
Professor Jasmina Havranek, Director
Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE)
Donje Svetice 38/5
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Dublin, 3 March 2017

Subject: Reconfirmation of membership of ASHE in ENQA

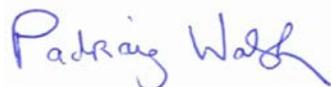
Dear Professor Havranek,

I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting of 13-14 February 2017, the Board of ENQA agreed that ASHE met the necessary requirements for reconfirmation of ENQA Membership for five years from that date. The ENQA Board concluded that ASHE is in substantial compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the Board would like to receive a follow-up report on the recommendations in the panel report (as outlined in the annex attached) within one year of its decision, i.e. by February 2018. The follow-up report is requested within one year especially to report on the state of progress concerning the SKAZVO Project as this could concern the criteria of all the accreditation procedures referring to ESG part I, and particularly on learning outcomes and any reference to the qualifications framework.

In addition, the Board recommends that you consider availing of the new ENQA procedure, i.e. a progress visit. The visit would take place after the submission of the follow-up report, in about two years' time from this decision. The ENQA Secretariat will be in touch with you in about a year's time to discuss this possibility. The costs of this visit have already been included as part of the review fee and are non-refundable except for the travel costs of the experts. More information about the progress visit can be found in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the ENQA Secretariat. Please accept my congratulations for the re-confirmation of membership of ASHE.

Yours sincerely,



Padraig Walsh
President

Annex: Areas for development

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ESG 3.1: The Agency is recommended – as is also envisaged and stated in the SAR – to strengthen the participation of international experts in its governance body and/or, if such should be established in the future, its advisory bodies, thus adding an international perspective to its operations at the level of institutional decision-making.

ESG 3.5: ASHE is suggested to study the possibility of assigning more resources to the Audit processes in order to finalize the first cycle of evaluations at the present qualitative and quantitative levels, and to run the procedure in its entirety, namely by including colleges which have not been subjects to audits yet.

ASHE is recommended, in particular also in the view of the increase in the number of accreditation procedures, to reflect on the workload it will entail for the present staff structure, and to take action if necessary.

ESG 2.1: ASHE is recommended, within the new accreditation models to be used in the next cycle, to focus on a more qualitative analysis of the criteria, which is, at this time, more quantitative-focused, taking particularly in account the specific qualitative features in ESG Part I mentioned above.

The Agency is recommended to produce a follow-up report in 2018 on the state of advancement and the impact of SKAZVO Project on the criteria of all the accreditation procedures referring to ESG part I and particularly on learning outcomes and reference to the Qualifications Framework.

ESG 2.2: ASHE is recommended to run Doctoral study programmes' accreditation through a unique procedure rather than two separate ones, and to take this objective into account during future legal negotiations.

ASHE is recommended to consider possibilities to introduce concepts of “self accreditation rights for programmes” to the benefit of HEI’s who have shown strong evidence for the existence of a robust internal quality management and quality assurance system. It could be connected with audit in future development of ASHE procedures and policies and should involve regular self-evaluation of study programs by internal QA systems at higher education institutions.

ASHE is recommended to reflect on a way of encouraging the HEIs to participate in the future Audit procedure, if it were to be voluntary, and to optimize its articulation with accreditation processes in order to avoid overlap, to foster the quality culture and to help improving Institutional internal quality assurance processes.

The Agency is strongly recommended to ensure a link of the new CROQF procedure to be launched in 2017 with accreditation procedures of any kind. In doing so, ASHE should also ensure provision of a more flexible approach to capture specificities of certain programmes which differ from the usual academic features, such as the arts, in a more adequate, flexible manner.

ESG 2.3: ASHE is recommended to look at the over-burdening effects to be witnessed in its Reaccreditation Procedures. The Agency is encouraged, when possible, to extend the site-visit duration in order to allow the panels to carry out more in-depth analysis resulting in more concrete recommendations in the reports, and to ask HEI's for providing more evidence before the visit.

ASHE is recommended to consider the inclusion of a follow-up procedure in the Initial Accreditation of study programmes, thus allowing applicants to remedy any shortcomings of minor significance.

ESG 2.4: ASHE is recommended to automatize, if possible, the presence of a representative of society, e.g. a business sector representative, in all its re-accreditation panels.

It is also recommended to organize a training (face-to-face or virtual) in the national context (due to the high number of international experts involved in the processes) but also on the interpretation of the criteria for the procedures the experts are expected to apply in the initial and re-accreditation processes.

ESG 2.5: ASHE is recommended to be more transparent as regards information on the overall policy of the criteria used by the Accreditation Council, as the decision-making body of the Agency, with a view to clarifying in which cases unconditional accreditation or accreditation accompanied by a letter of expectation is to be expected.

ASHE is recommended to iterate its endeavours to clarify the interpretation and implementation of the quality criteria, both by means of interpretative documents and through schooling.

ESG 2.6: ASHE is recommended to include a more in-depth analysis of the compliance of the HEI or study programme against the criteria in its published reports.

ASHE is recommended to publish the full reports of the Initial Accreditation procedure.

ESG 2.7: In the case of the re-accreditation procedure for Higher Education Institutions and study programmes, ASHE is recommended to provide a separate and standing Appeal Committee in order to dissociate the decision on the appeal from the Accreditation Council that has made the initial decision which is being appealed against. ASHE may also consider to establish the Appeal Committee as a standing committee, or to consider other modes of precaution to safeguard against any undue influence, which may occur when installing it ad hoc in view of the concrete case.

Regarding initial accreditation of study programmes and Higher Education Institutions, ASHE is recommended to provide an appeal procedure within the Agency.